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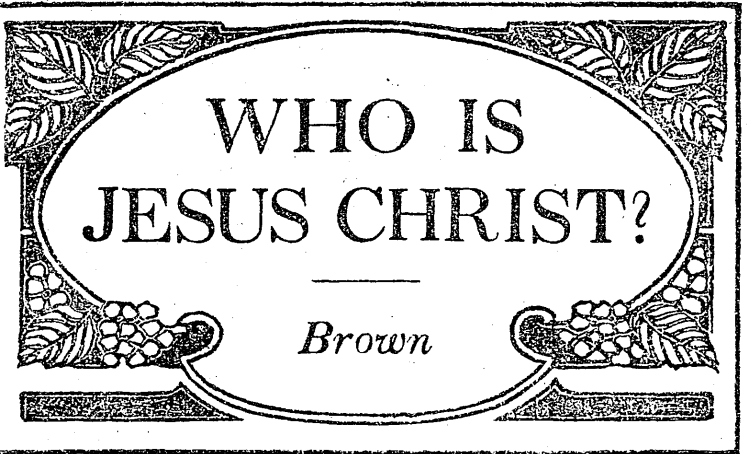
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Who
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Jesus
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WHO IS JESUS CHRIST?

Brown



WHO IS JESUS CHRIST?

WHO IS JESUS CHRIST?

BY

✓ CHARLES R. BROWN, 1862 -

Dean of the School of Religion,
Yale University

*Author of "The Master's Way," "The Quest of Life,"
"The Cap and Gown," "The Main Points," etc.*

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WHO IS JESUS CHRIST?

I am to speak to you this morning about the person of Christ. Let me make three preliminary remarks:

This is no mere speculative inquiry to be made by scholars, philosophers, and theologians, to be discussed in all its pros and cons and then to be laid away on the shelf after a conclusion has been reached—it is a question of most vital and significant interest.

Neither is it a mere question of historical appraisement and evaluation in the consideration of which we turn back nineteen hundred years and try to put a fairly accurate estimate upon a man who lived at that time in order that we may rank Him with other human beings. It is a question of present significance. What was Jesus Christ? Who was He? And not merely that, but, Who is He *now*? *Is* He merely a memory of a good man gone to His reward? *Is* He merely a disembodied spirit awaiting judgment at the

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hands of the Eternal? Can He enter into any kind of relations with the people here on earth as He did in Galilee? Can He sustain personal relationships with us such as He sustained with Peter and James and John? Is He in any real and personal sense Saviour and Lord? You can scarcely name a question more vital and significant than that. Let us remember, then, as we endeavor to ascertain what Jesus Christ is now, that it is not a mere question of historical appraisal.

It is furthermore a question raised by the Master Himself. He asked His disciples: "Whom do men say that I am?" They gave in reply the various appraisals of Him that were being made at the time—John the Baptist, Jeremiah, Elijah, or one of the prophets come to life again. None of these answers could he accept. But when Peter's answer came it was one that He could accept, and He thereupon turned and pronounced His benediction upon Peter. Bear in mind then that this is not a question of idle speculation; it is not a question of remote historical ap-

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praisement, but of present significant fact, and that it is a question raised by Jesus Christ Himself.

There have been two views—speaking broadly—of Jesus Christ which have been held almost from the very first. There has been the easier and the lower view which regarded Jesus as a great man—in fact, the wisest and best man that ever lived. The men who hold this view regard Him as a matchless teacher, one who spake as never man spake, one who put His teachings into such perfect literary form as to give them perennial charm and interest, one who condensed His teachings so that there was much in small compass. They also regard Him as one whose life matched His words; He was a perfect example of heroism and unselfishness, of purity and kindness; He possessed all those qualities that make for moral excellence—they were all found in Him at their best.

More than that, He was a moral hero. He was one ready to go to the cross, sealing His conviction with His own blood. He

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stopped at nothing to prove His fidelity to the cause He espoused. He was, moreover, one who manifested the divine character in some unusual measure, so that men found more of the divine in Him than in any other man.

I do not believe that I have stated this lower view unjustly. I want to put in everything that belongs there. I think I have stated it fairly. But after all, it amounts to about this, that He is not to be ranked as standing above the purely human category. He stands with Peter and James and John and Paul, with Martin Luther and Phillips Brooks, and with other great religious leaders. That view has been held and advocated with great earnestness and sincerity by many. The Gnostics, the Arians, the Socinians, and the Unitarians have been the devoted champions of this lower view of the person of Christ.

Then there is the view which I would call the higher view of Christ's person. It regards Christ as one who was indeed the Son of Man, one who embodied in Himself all

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that is essentially and eternally human, one who embodied in Himself all the human excellencies, so that men might turn to Him to find those characteristics which reveal humanity at its best. He was the Son of Man. But more than that, He was the Son of God—one who has for us all the religious value of God, one who so presented the divine character that He was the express image of God's person, one to whom men may look up in worship, one to whom men may pray, one who lives eternally and is capable of entering into what might be called cosmic relations with the moral universe, one capable of entering into personal relations with you and with me, as He did with Peter and James and John when He walked with them in the streets of Jerusalem and in the lanes of Galilee.

He was, as Dr. George A. Gordon has put it, one who was "the prototype of humanity existing eternally in the Godhead, but revealed to us in a historic personality as an abiding pledge of our own kinship with the divine." This is a theological definition, and

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it covers what I would regard as the higher view of Christ's person, one who was in every sense of the word divine.

I believe in the higher view. I hold to it strongly. I believe it to be a vital element in the Christian gospel. If we are to "preach Christ," we must preach that higher, fuller view of Christ's person in order to make His gospel effective. Let me indicate my reasons for holding that view. There are three main reasons that I shall briefly outline.

I

First of all, I find on the pages of the New Testament a certain portrait given to us by His contemporaries and by Himself. It is the portrait of one who was more than just a man. (1) We find that portrait in the synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke. These gospels are regarded by scholars as standing in a different class from the fourth gospel. They are more historic and, therefore, more accurate in their portrayal of Jesus of Nazareth. The fourth

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gospel is more metaphysical, more of a philosophical interpretation.

In these synoptic gospels we find the portrait of one who was to the writers more than human. We find the name of Jesus bracketted with the name of God. We find ascribed to Jesus the right to forgive sins. We find his name coupled with the name of the Father in the formula for baptism: "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

Remember that these men were Hebrews. They were trained and steeped in the doctrine of monotheism, the doctrine of one God. Over the cradle of every Hebrew child was chanted the formula that declared this great truth: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one." The very idea of giving divine honors to a human being would have been to these men a horrible crime, but when they came to write these synoptic gospels they affirmed that which indicated clearly their own view that Jesus was something more than human.

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(2) More than that, we find this same portrait in the letters of Paul. We find it in those letters that are unmistakably the letters of Paul. There is no more doubt in the minds of the more radical scholars that Paul wrote Galatians, First and Second Corinthians, and Romans, than there is that Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence. Paul was no dunce. He was a university man. He knew the difference between God and man; he understood the theological views of his time. And Paul used the Greek language with care and accuracy. When we come to his letters we find him drawing the same kind of a portrait that we found in the synoptic gospels. He couples the name of Jesus with the name of God the Father.

He had been trained in Judaism; he was a Pharisee of the Pharisees. But when he writes, Paul speaks of God and Jesus Christ together. He writes of "the love of God, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit." Over and over again we find him exalting Christ as the

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Saviour of the world. He prayed to Christ; he worshipped Christ.

(3) Now that same portrait we find also in the teachings of the fourth gospel. The Gospel of John appeared at a very early time; it was accepted by those men who had been fed upon the tradition of Christ's own teachings,—accepted as being veritable Scripture. We find no attempt made in the Gospel of John to secure the same standing for Peter or Paul or James, or for any other religious leader, that was made for Jesus. I attach therefore much importance to the testimony given in that Gospel.

In that Gospel we find this doctrine concerning the person of Christ in all its fullness. "I am the way, the truth, and the life." "No man cometh unto the Father but by me." "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." "I am the resurrection and the life." "He that believeth on me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." "I am the door: by me, if any man enter in, he shall be saved." "I am the bread that came down from heaven." "I am the light of the world:

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he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness." I could stand here for the next ten minutes giving these expressions which came from Him. Think of any man who ever lived, the best man who ever lived, and you cannot put into his mouth such expressions as, "I am the way"; "I am the door"; "I am the life." Here is the portrait of one who is more than human.

(4) In the fourth place, we find the testimony of Jesus regarding Himself. He knew—and He was no rattle-brained enthusiast—He knew how much was involved in making these high claims for Himself. Either they were made genuinely and accurately, or else He was guilty of blasphemy and arrogance such as we have never witnessed from any other on earth.

Here are some of the claims He made: He claimed to be sinless. You never find any word of penitence upon His lips. You never hear him offering a prayer for personal forgiveness. He taught us to pray for forgiveness, but He never prayed for His own

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shortcomings. "Who convicteth me of sin?" No one ever did.

He claimed the right to judge the world. In the Gospel of Matthew He pictured the Son of Man coming to judge the world, and we see Him dividing the sheep from the goats.

He took that central, vital position in the whole work of human salvation. Salvation depended upon knowing Him, upon following Him, upon becoming obedient to His own will. "Follow me"; Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest"; "Take my yoke upon you, and you will find rest unto your souls." I hold this higher view of Christ because I find that portrait on the pages of the New Testament—in the synoptic gospels, in the letters of Paul, in the fourth gospel, and in the teachings of Christ Himself. He was to all those writers who stood so much nearer to him than do we more than man.

II

In the second place, I hold the higher view of Christ because of the history of Christianity in the last nineteen hundred years. Here we are not dealing with theological speculation or with remote historical data; we are dealing with hard facts which can not be disputed. How do the facts of the centuries relate themselves to this higher view? What has been the verdict of the Christian ages? I am not a pragmatist, but I do believe that in the long run the truth will work better than anything else. You may not accept as full validation of any claim the fact that it has worked, but that ought to be something in its favor. If anything is to be established upon that basis, we want to have it tried over a wide area and for a long time. You cannot fully test every claim in ten years, but if you find that a certain truth has worked during sixteen hundred years and has worked all over the world, then those results will have great weight.

Now what are the results of this higher

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view in the mere matter of numbers? Those taking the lower-view of Christ are just a handful, comparatively speaking. Their number has not increased measurably. The lower view has not had the ability to command the widespread loyalty of men.

I am a Congregationalist myself. A little over a hundred years ago, we had a split in our denomination. There were those who held the lower view of Christ's person. They insisted upon that view, and they brought about a division of the Congregational Church. We have no strongly centralized authority in our body, and this radical difference in belief divided the denomination almost equally. The men who held the lower view of the person of Christ withdrew, taking with them a large amount of property and a large number of members who had belonged to the Congregational Church. That was a little over a hundred years ago. At that time the Unitarian leaders were saying that within twenty-five years all the Christians in the country would come over to their side. They now number something

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like 80,000 or 90,000, while the other branch of the Congregational Church holding the higher view of Christ's person numbers 800,000. And we are a very small denomination as compared with the Methodists with their 7,000,000, or the Baptists, who have almost as many more, or the Presbyterians, with their three or four millions, or the Lutherans with several millions, or the Episcopalians with a million more. Somehow those branches of the Christian Church which have held strongly and steadily the higher view of Christ have had the wind and the tide with them.

That branch of the Christian church which has held the lower view of Christ has not been able to show in its gospel that regenerating power which will take hold of a bad man and make him good. Show me among them a single work like that being done in the Jerry McAuley Mission in New York, the McCall Mission in Paris, the Pacific Garden Mission in Chicago, or the work of our own Bill Ellis in the Yale Mission in New Haven. Can you name a single

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place of that kind where they are making saints of men who were wrecked by their sins through the preaching of this lower idea of Christ's person? If you want to get the spirit of evil out of a man and the spirit of God into him, it seems that this higher view of Christ's person is needed to do the business.

The denomination which holds the lower view of Christ's person once had a piece of property in Boston where they had been using their own humane methods to help people, and they had been doing it with unstinted generosity. But they discovered that their preaching did not lay hold of the people in that section. It was in one of the poorer parts of Boston, not far from the red light district, a place where men and women were overcome by the coarsest sins. By and by, they took what was a very large-minded action. They went to the Methodists and said they were willing to let them take that property for a nominal rental and see what they could do with it. The Methodists took the work over. Today it has become the

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great Morgan Memorial work in Boston. It was a very handsome action on the part of the owners of that property, but it was practically a recognition of the fact that the gospel containing the higher view of Christ's person has a power over men that their gospel has not.

Where in the history of Christianity for nineteen hundred years do we find the great missionary movements—the generosity that is willing and ready to go with its convictions and its service out into the great pagan world, to undertake to introduce to those pagan people the Christian life as found in Jesus of Nazareth? Where do you find that? In those denominations which hold the higher view of Christ's person.

The others have tried, but they have been unsuccessful. It was an interesting occurrence when a representative of that branch of Christianity holding the lower view of Christ's person once came to the representatives of another society and said: "We would like to have a part in this foreign movement, but the missionaries we send out do not seem

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to be able to get hold of these people. If you will appoint some missionaries, assign them work, and direct them, we will be glad to furnish the money to pay their salaries. We will furnish the money; you furnish the men and give them directions, and let them preach your gospel."

This was generous, but it was also a frank admission that somehow the greater strength of Christianity lies in those branches of the Christian Church that hold the higher view of Christ's person. "Men do not gather grapes of thorns nor figs of thistles." Is it any more probable that men would get the best results from some distortion of the truth rather than from the truth itself? When we observe that in seventeen centuries of Christian activity somehow the larger measure of success comes with the higher view of Christ's person and comparative failure with the lower view, it surely must mean something.

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III

The third main reason why I hold this higher view is because I find it spiritually satisfying to myself and to other men. When men become conscious of their guilt, conscious of their sin, conscious of their need of spiritual help, I find that somehow faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, the Saviour of mankind, is satisfying as the other belief is not.

I turn back to the time of my own conversion. I felt that I was lost; I was alienated from God. I wanted something to change and renew my own heart. I put my faith in Jesus Christ, and by putting my faith in Him and my sins behind me I received that help in which I have ever since rejoiced. That experience was not peculiar to me. It is the experience of penitent men everywhere. When we believe that the divine and the human were blended in one perfect life in that vital fashion, we can believe that the human and the divine elements may be blended in every believing soul, so

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that we can become worthy sons and daughters of the Most High.

We have ceased to speak of the human and the divine as standing over against each other with a great gulf fixed between them, as if they were entirely unlike. We have come to think of them more in the New Testament terms of the branch and the vine, the father and the child. Man is made potentially in the image of God and with capacity to receive unto himself the divine help. When we believe in this because of our observation of what has been historically realized in Jesus Christ, there comes the sense of an almighty reinforcement.

These are my three reasons for holding the higher view: because of the portrait given of Christ in the New Testament, both by His contemporaries and by Himself; because of the history of the Christian movement during the last nineteen hundred years; because the higher view is spiritually satisfying as the other view is not.

There are serious intellectual difficulties involved in holding this belief. It is dif-

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ficult to understand how Christ could be both human and divine. How could he be tempted like as we are? How could he be subject to all the laws of growth, increasing in stature, in wisdom, and in favor with God and with man? How could he taste the whole human situation for every man and yet be the Son of God and Saviour of men? It is not easy to understand. There are a great many things which we do not find it easy to understand, but that does not indicate for a moment that there is no truth in them, or that they cannot be utilized in this life of ours.

I am much at a loss to understand electricity. I can not understand how that subtle invisible force comes into the car to make it move, to light it at night, and to warm it in winter. The electrical engineers do not understand it. They say it is "a form of energy." But that does not mean anything. A dog going down street with a tin can tied to his tail is also "a form of energy." The motorman on the front platform of the car does not understand it. He calls it "juice,"

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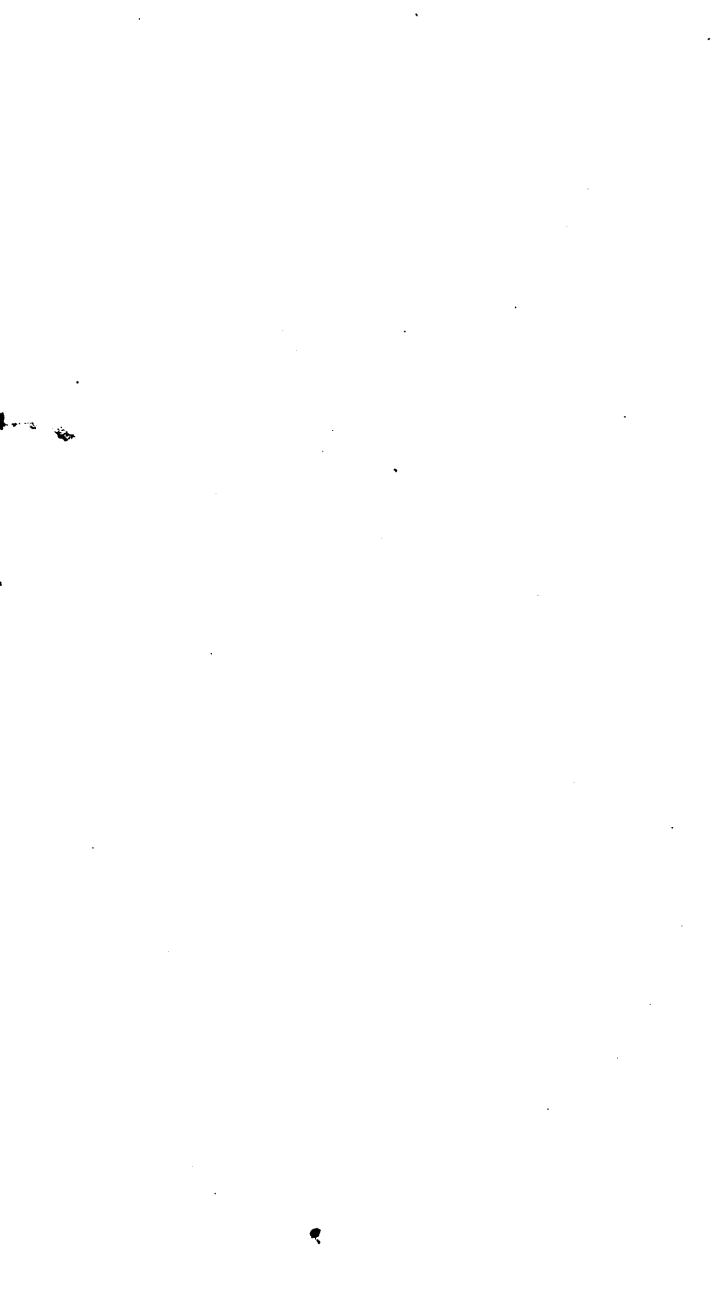
and when he says that he has done just as much to express his final ignorance of the real nature of electricity as the man who uses five words of nine syllables each.

But we can use electricity, even when "we know in part." I would be a fool to stand on the street corner in the storm and refuse to ride home in the lighted and heated car, reading my paper in comfort, just because I do not understand everything about electricity. I can use that subtle, invisible power for my own advantage even though I do not understand all the mysteries connected with its operation.

So with my view of the person of Jesus Christ! When I come to consider the question as to whether He was self-deceived or guilty of blasphemy; when I come to consider whether those contemporaries were misled in the high estimate they put upon Him; when I look to these nineteen centuries of Christian success and wonder whether they were all mistaken; when I come to the deeper experiences of my own heart, I am forced to believe that Christ is the Son of the living

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God, the Saviour of the world. I use the power that comes from that faith for my own life and for the lives of my fellow men. Therefore I rejoice in the belief that Jesus Christ is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believes, even though that claim holds many a mystery as yet unsolved.



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